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## CHILD LABOR IN HOME INDUSTRIES

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The present employment of children in tenements in New York City gives no ground for optimism regarding New York State's method of regulating home work. A casual investigator who chooses to walk through the crowded tenement districts will find children at work who would not be permitted to enter a factory. He will see women and children carrying bundles of clothing or boxes of artificial flowers from work-shop to home, and if he should follow any of them he would learn something of the system of industry which makes child labor still possible in New York State.

Two days ago one of my fellow-workers visited a family living on Thompson street. It was after school hours. She found a mother and four children making artificial flowers. The oldest girl was eleven years old. Her sister was nine, her little brother was seven, and a little sister was five. The three older children had just come home from school, but the youngest child was too young to go, and worked all day separating the petals of artificial flowers. The oldest child of eleven years was deformed. She was not larger than a child of five.

The mother and four children have set themselves a certain allotment of work to finish each day, and the book in which their earnings are recorded by the employer says that those earnings are sixty cents a day. To earn that sixty cents a day they must make six dozen wreaths of daisies, three or four pieces to each daisy, and thirty-nine daisies on each wreath. The father is a ragman earning six dollars a week. The brother is out of work. The mother and children work until ten or eleven o'clock at night, and what they do not finish at night they must get up in time to finish in the morning before school begins. The little girl, Angelina, said she did the work the teacher gave her to do at home before school in the morning. "This morning, first I did the writing," she said, "then I did the two times, and then the three times, so I won't have so much to do

to-morrow. I like school better than home. I don't like home. There's too many flowers."

There is no law violated by the employment of those children. They are in school when they ought to be in school. The building has been inspected by the tenement department and the factory department and found satisfactory, and there is nothing which legally can be done to prevent the work of five-, seven-, nine- or eleven-year-old children.

Similar stories might be multiplied, but this may serve as a picture of present conditions. Within a month forty-two families of homeworkers selected at random have been visited, and in them fifty-nine children under fourteen years of age were found at work. The importance of these few cases is more fully realized when we read in the bulletin of the New York State Department of Labor in September, 1909, that in New York City on June 30th of this year there were 11,162 licensed tenements. The corresponding number for 1908 was 9,805. In 1906 there were 5,261. We do not know how many families were living in those tenements, nor how many children were at work at home, but the number of licensed houses has been increasing at the rate of two thousand a year. This does not necessarily mean that the homework system has been spreading. It does mean, however, that the labor department is discovering hundreds of tenements each year in which home manufacture is carried on. Whatever may be said of New York's law regulating manufactures in tenements, it does not appear that it has had the effect of decreasing the amount of work given out to be done in homes. It is characteristic of the system that its evils are its life, that the unrestricted competition of unskilled workers, the unregulated hours of work, and the employment of children are the things which make it profitable for the manufacturer. It seems obvious that to eradicate these evils we must find some way of checking and in time eliminating the system from which they are inseparable.

The development of the New York law is an illustration of an attempt to "regulate" a system which thrives on failures to regulate it. When the law prohibiting the making of cigars in tenements was declared unconstitutional in 1885 the legislature made no further attempt to deal with this subject until 1892, when the law was passed providing for the licensing of apartments in which certain articles were manufactured. From time to time the law has been amended,

but its essential provision, the license, remains unchanged. More than forty separate articles are named, and none of these may be manufactured in any living rooms unless the house has been licensed by the New York State Department of Labor. A license is issued when the department has ascertained that there are no orders outstanding against the property either in the tenement-house department or the board of health, and when a factory inspector has reported that sanitary conditions are satisfactory. The manufacturer, the owner of the house, and the worker are all held responsible if any of the articles named in the law are made in unlicensed houses. In brief, the law is designed merely to establish a certain standard of sanitation in home workrooms.

The best test of its effectiveness is the actual present condition and extent of tenement manufacturers in New York. From three investigations among several which have been made, the outlines of these conditions may be traced. In 1902 the Department of Labor investigated more than 1,000 home workers in New York City. In 1907 the same department made a special inquiry into the employment of children in licensed tenements on three or four streets. At the same time an investigation was being carried on by the Child Labor committees, national and city, the Consumers' Leagues, national and city, and the College Settlements Association. In these two last studies made in a very limited territory in a brief period of time, 558 children who could not legally have worked in a factory in New York State were found working at home. The youngest was three years old. More than half were less than eleven years. Forty children were out of school in violation of the compulsory education law. Twenty-three were too young to be protected by its provisions. Nearly half the houses in which these children were at work had not been licensed. Fifty cents a day was a common wage representing the earnings of at least two workers.

More than a dozen different articles found in the tenements were not named in the law, so that the houses in which they were manufactured did not come under the wording of any labor legislation. For example, children were found sewing a fine quality of kid glove in a house which the department of labor had refused to license. Because gloves were not named in the law this work was permissible.

The great majority of the home workers are Italians. A few are Germans or Russian Jews, and a few are native born. Only a very small proportion are native born of native parents. One little Italian girl was asked whether she had ever made flowers in Italy. She said "No" with great emphasis, and added, "When we were in Italy we used to think it was funny that people made flowers in New York. In Italy we have them natural."

It is not merely the most recent arrivals among the immigrants who are at work in their homes. In the official investigation of 1902 only eleven of 705 licensees were recorded as having been in this country less than one year. More than one-half had been here longer than five years.

In the investigation of the work of children no family was found in which the income from homework was sufficient for support. In the official study of 1902 it was found that the average earnings of homeworkers' families in the clothing trade were \$3.67. Artificial flower makers earned \$2.07 a week. A worker, who reported recently that the price for making a flower had been reduced from five cents a gross to two cents a gross, said, "You see, some women are willing to do it for that, and the rest must do it if they want the work. Two women came to our factory the other day and offered to work at home a week for nothing if the boss would give them the work."

When we sum up this sketch of the conditions of homework and place beside it an outline of the law, the two do not balance. On the one side are the unrestricted hours of work for women, the employment of children, and a scale of wages tending to slide downward. On the other side are elaborate provisions for regulating the sanitary conditions of home workrooms. We seem to have taken no thought of the industrial problem involved, namely, to establish a plane of competition which cannot be lowered by the exigencies or the needs of individual workers. We have left the manufacturer singularly free. Every other effective factory law lays the responsibility on his shoulders. In our regulation of homework in New York all that we do is to give him a list of addresses, and say, "We have inspected these tenements and found them sanitary. You may give out work to families living in them. You must not send work into any other houses."

To point out possible methods of safeguarding the workers'

freedom and increasing the manufacturers' responsibility in the homework system is beyond the scope of this address and belongs rather to the discussion which will follow. It may be said, however, that the evils characteristic of home industries are but one manifestation of a condition prevailing in other systems of industry, whereby the worker is deprived of real freedom to contract. Advantage is taken of his needs to force him to accept the lowest possible wage. The extreme condition found to so large an extent on Manhattan Island is really but one striking example of a similar industrial servitude in factories as well as in homes throughout the country. To prevent such servitude is the child labor problem in home industries.